

NSC BRIEFING

27 June 1956

**"INDEPENDENT" COMMUNIST PARTIES**

- I. Communist parties in Italy, France, Britain and the US have issued a rash of statements critical of present-day Soviet leaders--treating the world to rare spectacle of biting hand that has fed them for forty years. One persistent complaint in all these parties is annoyance that good Communists were forced to read Khrushchev's "secret" speech in copies furnished by the US Government.
  - A. The critical remarks all boil down to two questions which Moscow is asked to answer with a sound "Marxist explanation":
    1. How did these iniquities creep into the system when some of the present Soviet leaders were around?
    2. What guarantee is there against a recurrence?
  - B. Togliatti, on 21 June, lashed out: "We might believe that, apart from the impossibility of making a timely change, the Soviet leaders might at least have been more prudent in the public and solemn exaltation of the qualities of this man (Stalin) with which they had familiarized us. It is true that they now blame themselves, and this is their great merit, but undoubtedly part of their prestige is lost in this criticism."
  - C. American Communist Party statement, on 24 June, said: "We cannot accept an analysis of such profound mistakes which attributes them solely to the capricious aberrations of a

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single individual, no matter how much arbitrary power he was wrongly permitted to usurp."

- D. French Communist Party, on 18 June, declared: "It is not right to attribute to Stalin, alone, everything that has been negative in the attitude of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union."
- E. British Communist Party, on 22 June, said: "...we agree with observations of comrade Togliatti and the French Communist Party that it will be necessary to make a profound Marxist analysis of the causes of the degeneration in the functioning of Soviet democracy and party democracy; that it is not enough to attribute these developments solely to the character of one individual; and that a more adequate estimate of the role of Stalin, both in its positive and negative aspects, will be necessary."

II. Although critical, all these statements are put in the context of admiration and loyalty for the Communist system and the USSR, and all statements give credit to the present Soviet leadership for finally putting the Socialist train back on the right track.

- A. Their content makes it clear that the Western parties are engaged in a common effort to follow the new Communist line of "different roads to socialism," laid down at 20th Party Congress.
- B. Central theme of all pronouncements is "independence" of foreign Communist parties from Moscow control.

III. This "independence" movement, now dutifully being attempted in all the parties, places Western Communist parties in a difficult position, particularly in Italy, where Togliatti's comrades are already restive.

A. Togliatti's problem is:

1. To make gestures of going to the right, in order to keep Nenni from exploiting either his recent electoral success or the questions raised by Khrushchev's speech;
2. At the same time, to stay left enough to avoid complete disorientation of his party cadres.

B. Nenni is having a field-day, at the expense of the Kremlin.

Two of his barbs:

"Of the historical and military films of Stalin, [Khrushchev] says that 'they make us sick.' The snag is that on those films, on those books, on those poems there was organized the most vast propaganda hoax in the memory of the world."

"It would be absurd to close one's eyes to the fact that the dictatorship of the proletariat has resolved itself into a dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party, and this, in turn, into a personal dictatorship of Stalin, and thus put itself beyond the bounds of the prophecies and concepts of the masters of Socialism."

C. Togliatti's nervousness is indicated by his statement on a possible break with Nenni: "With the Socialist Party we have achieved a high degree of unity, establishing in agreement with

it that 'unity of action' which remains a fundamental victory of the Italian working and laboring masses. The whole movement toward Socialism would suffer profoundly if the 'unity of action pact' should be--I won't say lost, but attenuated or weakened. We are striving that this should not come about."

**IV. What are these Communist leaders trying to accomplish? As usual there is more than one layer of purpose:**

- A. The foreign Communist leaders are in a tough spot in trying to maintain discipline and unity in their parties in the face of confusion and uncertainty within their own rank and file.**
  - 1. They must provide a rationale that somehow shows that the sordid details of Stalin's crimes and errors are compatible both with basic Communist faith about past achievements of the Communist system and with its future promise.**
  - 2. They must show they are not slavish followers of Moscow, but legitimate national party leaders capable of representing the views of their followers, even if these are critical of the USSR.**
- B. On the other hand, these foreign Communist leaders also make it clear they have not repudiated their loyalty to the international Communist movement.**
  - 1. Instead, they are trying to reorient the foreign Communist parties as "legitimate" national political organizations, effectively representing local interests rather than Soviet interests.**

2. As such, these local Communist parties would be suitable partners for parliamentary collaboration with Social Democrats and other left groups in "popular fronts."

3. All this is completely in line with the basic blueprint of peaceful coexistence and the parliamentary road to Socialism (i.e., Communism) laid down in Moscow at the Soviet 20th Party Congress (February 1956).

C. This situation will be tough for the Western Communists for a time, but the USSR and the local parties stand to gain over the long haul if they pull off Moscow's long-term plan of ostensibly cutting the local parties loose and setting them up in business as respectable political organizations.

1. Only time will tell whether the "new" independence will pay off and whether Togliatti, Thorez et al will survive the rough ride they are now taking.

V. The Soviet regime is trying much the same game in the Satellites, where controls are ostentatiously being "loosened" and the former heretic "national" Communist, Tito, is being clutched to the Soviet bosom.

A. This is also a risky game, and there is also wrangling and criticism in the Satellites--especially in Poland and Hungary.

B. Moscow is in a stronger position, because of the proximity of Soviet power, to keep this "new liberalism" in the Satellites

within bounds and will probably maintain the essential elements of control even though a few ex-Stalinist Satellite leaders fall by the wayside in the process.

VI. In Moscow, Soviet leaders may be speculating, even as we are, over how well they will be able to manage this turbulent process of change, set in motion when they adopted the "new look" in Soviet foreign policy, repudiated Stalin's many crimes and committed themselves to collective leadership, socialist legality, and toleration of "different roads to Socialism."

A. They must have thought they could keep the process in hand.



VII. In any case, this chorus of Western Communist demands for a Soviet "explanation" has set the stage for an authoritative Moscow pronouncement--or "Marxist analysis"--expounding not only the measures taken or planned by the present Soviet leadership to prevent a repetition of Stalin's errors but also taking all possible blame off the present leaders.

A. Soviet readiness to pronounce on the subject is indicated by Pravda's 27 June reprinting of the 18 June New York Daily Worker article by Eugene Dennis, containing his formulation of the key critical questions:

1. Dennis asked, first, if any of the present Soviet leaders had tried to change anything in the period before Stalin died: "Could the evil which was done have been cut short earlier?" Then he posed the second question: "How great and how serious are the changes which have now taken place?"

B. Printing of the Dennis piece constitutes the first public Soviet reference to Khrushchev's "secret" speech, as well as the first publicity to be given to Western Communist criticism.

C. Having thus made the matter public, the Soviet leaders can hardly avoid a direct reply.

**VIII. It looks as if a grand Communist conclave was gathering in Moscow right now.**

**A. Three members of the politburo of the French Communist party left Paris on 26 June for Moscow, to hold talks with Soviet leaders.**



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**C. All of these leaders will probably be given definitive answers on how to play the anti-Stalin campaign from this point on.**

**IX. Soviet leaders probably hope that authoritative answer to Togliatti's and Dennis' questions will get both the USSR and the foreign Communist parties over this rough hump and eventually into a new era--when the world forgets about Stalin's iniquities and sees Moscow as the seat of a "humane" and "liberal" form of Communism carrying on nothing more sinister than "comradely exchanges of information" with Communist parties abroad.**